

## Interview with Robert S. Smith

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR ROBERT S. SMITH

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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*Q: Today is April 14, 1988. This is an interview with Robert S. Smith concerning his career in the Foreign Service. This interview is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies. My name is Charles Stuart Kennedy. Mr. Ambassador, I wonder could you explain what attracted you to a career in foreign affairs?*

SMITH: Yes, my college years were interrupted by World War II, and I was off in the Navy and came back to finish up. I had gone to college to Yale, planning to major in economics, and found Yale back in the 19th century in economics and shifted to international relations, just because it seemed interesting. International relations in those days was primarily a collection of modern history courses, plus a little bit of diplomatic history and international law. Well, I came back and graduated and with the war experience behind me, was more convinced than ever that something had to be done significantly in achieving and maintaining peace, and I thought that that's what I wanted to get into. So, during my post-war senior year at college, I got involved in the founding of the U.S. National Student Association. This was 1947. And in the summer of '47 I went with a student group over to Europe to a couple of conferences. I came back to the U.S. NSA's first conference, therefore, as an "expert" on foreign affairs and was, therefore, elected its Vice President for International Affairs in its first year. In that capacity I had the good fortune

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to be designated to be the student representative on the then fairly new U.S. National Commission for UNESCO, and I spent two years on that representing American students.

*Q: Was this a government sponsored commission or were you paid?*

SMITH: I was only paid for the trips down to Washington from graduate school, Harvard, and would come down for meetings of various bodies of the commission. But it was a presidentially-appointed commission, consisting of government and private members. I don't know whether it still exists since we are not currently members of UNESCO, but it did exist until fairly recently. Then that moved me into the student end of international activities, and while I was working in Geneva for an international student organization, I was invited by the man who had been the Executive Director of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO and had been assigned as the permanent delegate to UNESCO in Paris to come up and be his assistant. And I went up and was Deputy U.S. Permanent Delegate to UNESCO.

*Q: Who was the man?*

SMITH: It was a man named Charles Thompson, who had had a career in international affairs in the Department starting in Latin American affairs but then getting post-war into UNESCO.

*Q: I wonder if you could describe a little for me how you viewed the student movement both in the United States and the other ones you dealt with from other countries.*

SMITH: Well, the students in the States in the immediate post-war period were not nationally organized in a broad body. There were the Student Christian movement, Catholic organizations, Jewish organizations, a couple of communist student organizations, socialist student organizations, etc. But the feeling was that if we wanted a truly representative body we had to get the student governments of different colleges to select people as their representatives, and that's what we set out to do. The original raison

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d'tre for it was to be affiliated with something called the International Union of Students, which was then based in Prague and was already clearly communist dominated. And our feeling, those who got the U.S. organization started, was maybe we could go in and get them a little more balanced, try to turn the tide a bit. Well, we did plan to join up and then the Prague coup occurred in 1948 and we pulled back from that.

But I did have the experience in the summer of '47 of doing some negotiating with those people, and it was my first contact with Soviet and Eastern European communists as well with a lot of other Europeans, and it was a very marvelous learning experience and a challenging and quite unforgettable experience. After that, the students divided into different organizations in Europe with the communist group based in Prague and a freedom or non-communist, or whatever you want to call it, organization which got created in 1950 in Stockholm and then had its base in different countries. I guess its headquarters were in the Netherlands. And then there still were a number of other groups around of a more specialized nature.

*Q: Well then, so you really right from the beginning of the post-war world were involved on a close to the top in international affairs. You then became part—was this included in the UNESCO delegation of '51 to '53 or was this different?*

SMITH: This was—'51 to '53 was in Paris in the UNESCO delegation. And the one thing that stands out about that is in those days the Soviet bloc were not yet members of UNESCO. So it was a delightful place to work with a lot of intellectuals from Western Europe and Latin America and beginning to be some from Asia, a few Africans who were not yet independent but still were working there in the secretariat, and the issues were such as what to do about saving the monuments along the Nile as the great dam was built.

*Q: This was the Aswan dam?*

SMITH: The Aswan dam, right. And magnificently published, printed and published books on works of art in Italy and Yugoslavia and various places, a number of issues on human

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rights but in a fairly general way at the time. It was nevertheless exciting. It didn't have the East-West politics to it, but it had a lot of post-war politics and the U.S. played a pretty strong role at the time and even had a U.S. Director General selected just about at the time I was leaving.

I would have probably continued—this was a Foreign Service reserve appointment—and would have applied for admission to the career Foreign Service at the time but, lo and behold, in '53 after Eisenhower came in, my position was eliminated in maybe the first RIF ever.

*Q: RIF means reduction in force in government terms.*

SMITH: Right. And the result was I was out on my own, just married and trying to decide what to do with the rest of my life. This had been a wonderful two years, but I figured rather than just go back home we ought to take advantage of where we were and our interests. And so my first wife and I then spent a year going through the Middle East and Asia gathering material for what became my Ph.D. thesis on Cultural and Information Programs of Newly Independent Countries, used as instruments of their foreign policy, kind of their equivalents of our USIA. We worked our way around and traveled and had lots of interviews and research in some libraries and then came home. And I finished up the deeper research back here.

*Q: You got your doctorate at Harvard, is that correct?*

SMITH: Yes, it is. I finally got the doctorate in '56. But when I came back and was working on the thesis I worked then part-time for the American Association for the United Nations in New York, and then I worked for the Asia Foundation in New York, finally finished up the thesis and decided it was time to go overseas again. I applied for a position with the U.S. delegation to the UN in New York, but before that came through because of long, slow security clearances—this was '56—I got an offer to go and work in Geneva again at something called the World Federation of UN Associations, which was an

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international non-governmental organization. And I accepted that and, of course, shortly after accepting it got the security clearance and offer of the job at the UN, but I had made my commitments so I went ahead. I spent five years with that in Geneva.

Now, that was an organization of about 50 member bodies in UN member countries, and that did include the Soviets and the Eastern bloc. And there we got into a lot of very fascinating negotiations. We had conferences on how to teach about the UN, in Romania, in Pakistan, in Italy, in the Philippines. I traveled to the associations in Southeast Asia, in Indonesia, in the Philippines and Thailand, and then all over Europe.

*Q: Well, what was the attitude of the Soviets as far as teaching about the United Nations within their country or within the bloc?*

SMITH: They were quite prepared to do it, of course, on their terms, and they considered themselves as a democracy, as a democratic government I should say, and their positions would nevertheless be turned to what the Soviets were most concerned about in the UN at the time. We were a little bit too much a miniature model of the UN General Assembly, but we did get some fairly good teaching programs across, reaching new schools and teachers and libraries, things like that. But the political issues remained kind of hot and intense in that organization. Again, it still exists today. I stayed with it for five years because the travel was interesting and the work was interesting. Then I returned to the states in '61 and went back into government, got a job with AID at that time.

*Q: Well, before we move on to your government experience, what was the impression you had of the United Nations, the concept of this, as a working organization?*

SMITH: I had done a Master's thesis on the functional organizations of the UN. This preceded my time at UNESCO in Paris, so I had a UN orientation already. I had done the work with the American Association for the UN. In those days, we're talking 25, 30 years ago now, there was still some belief that the UN could be a significant peace-making organization and a strong feeling even then that the functional organizations,

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World Health, FAO, Food and Agricultural Organization and so on, could serve useful purposes in getting international regulations and international negotiations on issues critical to people both in the developed and in the developing world. And I think out of the experience there I became less and less impressed with the possibilities of the UN as a peace-making organization and more and more convinced of its critical usefulness in some of these functional areas.

*Q: I think it's hard for somebody today—we're talking about the 1980s—to understand the hope and the allegiance to the United Nations among young students. I am four years younger than you, but I remember in college that we really were pointed towards this as being something that really had a chance. We'd flunked the League of Nations test and we weren't going to flunk this test.*

SMITH: That's very well put. One of our heroines at the time was Eleanor Roosevelt. She was active in the U.S. association and came to the annual meetings of this World Federation. And, of course, by then she was the grand old lady of human rights and peace and all of that, and I happened to be an enormous admirer of hers. There are others who are not, who were not. But no one would disagree that she played a tremendous role in creating popular interest in the UN. And as you say, in some ways it was quite emotional. Those of us who believed in the UN. in those days believed in it right down to the gut. I don't think that exists in anywhere near the same degree today.

*Q: No. Well, what were you doing when you came into the government in 1961?*

SMITH: I came into AID in its Far East Bureau as a Program Officer. I applied there because, again, I clearly wanted to be in the international field. By then I was in my mid-30s. It seemed a little late to get into the career Foreign Service. I had some personal problems of a child who had had a difficult birth in Geneva and we'd come back in '61 because of that, and it looked as though I might not get to go overseas at least for some time. So rather than get into a service which would force me to make that kind of decision

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every year or two, I got a Civil Service appointment in AID. I worked in the Far East Bureau. I did a lot of travel out to East Asian and Southeast Asian countries, became its Director of Planning, did that for about three years, then spent a couple of years in the Policy Planning Staff of AID.

*Q: Could you describe a bit about your work, including the Asian experience, and the Policy Planning? I mean how did we approach looking at it beyond just responding to individual aid requests?*

SMITH: The efforts in those early 60s, the beginning of AID and the upbeat Kennedy Administration years when AID funding started to go up substantially, involved a strong belief that the U.S. had an obligation to help the developing world, stronger than it had been since the Truman days of Point Four. And what we were trying to do on the planning side was to take a look at countries' overall needs and to see where the U.S. could fit in. I think in those early 60s we envisaged ourselves doing the whole thing, with assistance from other donors and World Bank and so on, but seeing ourselves as the prime movers. I think a few years later we began to learn that that was not possible for a variety of reasons. One, financially not possible; Congress wasn't going to accept that. Two, the needs were too great. Three, attitudes toward the U.S. in a number of countries were such that for us to be front and center in development wasn't necessarily as productive as if it was a group of donors or even specifically working kind of behind the front running World Bank and UN. But in those first days we were looking at comprehensive development plans for countries. I'd been in AID just three or four months when I went out with a team to Indonesia for a couple of months. This had been in response to a visit from Sukarno to Kennedy, and Sukarno had asked for help from the United States early in the Kennedy Administration. And Kennedy had said, "Okay, I'll send out a high level economic team." Well, we had a Brookings economist, we had a couple of other academic economists, and then three of us from AID and State working with this team as the bag carriers and researchers and so on. And we looked at the whole economy of that country, rubber production, tea production, shipping, labor problems, came back with an enormously

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comprehensive report and then, of course, found that no one was about to pick up and do all of this. Some parts of it were done. Political issues intervened in terms of Sukarno getting less favored after a while and all of that. But that was the approach in those early days of AID.

*Q: Were you there in AID when we began to change our focus?*

SMITH: Yes, I stayed in AID, well, kind of in and out of AID until '69.

*Q: Did you find the usual bureaucratic resistance? It's great to run a program and it's very difficult to become second banana to the World Bank or to other countries. I mean within the bureaucracy. How did this play out in Washington?*

SMITH: That bothered people. I think that some of us who had come in with the big picture in the beginning were frustrated when AID gradually shifted its role to looking at particular sectors and—I can't remember all the phraseology that was used at the time, but meeting human needs, things like that. The idea was that we had to get away from big construction and infrastructure projects because they were too costly and too slow and just focus on health and food and so on.

On the other hand, I did get into one of the revisions of this policy quite deeply, and that's what got me into Africa. In '66, Senator Fulbright was beginning to say, "I'm worried about future Vietnams," and, as early as '66, "and I don't like the idea of our having little AID programs all over the world in all these little countries which could drag us backwards into conflicts in those countries and hence into more and more commitments that we may not want to get into." And with that kind of pressure from the Hill—he was Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee at the time and very influential, and Lyndon Johnson was President, so it was a Democrat talking to a Democrat—State decided it had to make a major shakeup of AID policy in Africa. And a small team was created under the man who had come in from outside to be our Ambassador to Ethiopia, a man named Ed Korry, to take a look at the whole African AID picture. At that point I was in this Policy Planning



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staff. In typical government fashion, since I knew absolutely nothing about Africa but knew a good deal about AID programming and planning, and they wanted one person who didn't have prior views one way or the other on Africa, I was chosen, along with a team of three people from State and one other from AID who was the Director of Program for the Africa Bureau of AID, and Ed Korry, the Chairman. One of the other members of the team was Oliver Troxel, who later became Ambassador to Zambia. I think he has also since retired. But we worked for a couple of months in Washington pulling together things on the African countries and their programs and what they ought to be, and we came up with something called the Korry Report. And I must say this was perhaps my most fascinating government experience in how to deal with the bureaucracy. The report had been called for by the Secretary of State. It was done by this team. It recommended that we concentrate our bilateral AID programs in just ten African countries, those where we had a special interest, such as Liberia or Ethiopia or the big ones such as Nigeria and Zaire, and that for the rest of Africa we do it through regional programs setting up three or four regional offices, one in Abidjan in West Africa, one in Nairobi in East Africa, one in Zambia for Southern Africa, and have everything except those ten bilateral programs come under the rubric of regional programs. There were a few other refinements to it. This policy was developed by the team. It was submitted to the White House. In July of '66 President Johnson gave his approval in general of the report, and then we were told, okay, now go implement it. So here we had the President's imprimatur on a set of about 60 recommendations. The team disbanded and I was left as the person to get the report into an implementation stage. So I was assigned as a Special Assistant to Ambassador Joe Palmer, who was then Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, to work on this report. And it was a question of taking some 50 or 60 recommendations which involved a dozen or 15 U.S. government agencies and trying to get them from a broad policy statement into a set of action statements and programs. And anyone who has ever worked in the government bureaucracy knows that at that point, for all the support you're going to have from the White House and from the State Department, you aren't worth much when you go up against Treasury and Commerce and some of the others, such as Ex-Im Bank, so

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it took a lot of fascinating negotiations and compromises on a lot of points. And I worked on that from the summer of '66 to the spring of '67. We finally got a good bit of it approved and this Korry Report strategy became the approach for Africa.

*Q: Well, going back a bit on putting this together. First, when you were on this committee, how did things work with say the Africanists versus people who had other interests? I mean, you were brought in because you were not an Africanist. Did you find they had a different approach, everything for their country, or not?*

SMITH: Well, in the first instance I had to accept their knowledge of the African countries and had to do a lot of quick learning. I didn't have a problem with, you know, disagreeing with them. It was rather questioning, and sometimes I think I was able to raise questions if only out of ignorance that made them think a little more about whether such and such made sense. And I did not have the, if you want to call it, prejudice in favor of Africa when I started in that. I must admit that, at the end of a couple of months, Africa appeared to be a pretty exciting continent.

*Q: Well, did you sense when you were there—you were there in the, you started in the mid-60s—there had been complaints from some people that there were what they called the romantics starting with Soapy Williams and all who thought Africa was sort of the center of the world and we could do all things there. And for others they felt they were not being very pragmatic about what were American interests and also what we could do. Was this a problem?*

SMITH: Well, that had changed, because when Joe Palmer had succeeded Soapy Williams as Assistant Secretary it was to get someone there who, while he knew Africa well—Joe had served as Consul General or Consul in Rhodesia pre-independence and then had served, just finished as Ambassador to Nigeria when he came into the job—was a very successful, very steady career professional rather than what you would call a romantic, as a way of defining Soapy Williams. And I think that's accurate.

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I really got into this after Soapy had left, but his aura was still very much around and there were still a few people around who reflected some of the same dreams. And the Africanists outside the State Department and AID who one would meet would all still be deeply emotionally involved. It was seductive. It was very seductive, because here was kind of the last continent to open up, the last group of countries to become independent, lots of hopes and aspirations, and any country at the moment of independence and shortly after talks about its glorious past and its magnificent future and tries to play down its miserable present. And I think we were caught by all that. Incidentally that was something I had learned in writing my doctoral thesis, because the countries I had dealt had been newly independent countries. Egypt, Israel, Pakistan, and India, which in those days in the 50s when I was doing my research were just out of colonialism, or fairly recently out of colonialism, and had very little to say about what they were doing at the moment or what they could do, but had great dreams for the future and, of course, magnificent rich pasts. And then, too, the message was: "This is what we're going to do." And that's what the Africans were saying. And you had to look pretty deep and you had to be fairly cynical at that time to say, well, can they ever make it? Today I think that's changed.

*Q: Well, were there any countries in this grand plan of say the ten countries that gave particular problems?*

SMITH: Well, you can hardly consider democracy to be prevalent in Africa in almost any African country. So we were faced all along with centralized governments, dictators, not so much military leaders at that point, and a few political problems. But these were basically friendly countries. Ethiopia was still under the Emperor. Nigeria was not a particular friend of the U.S. but was pro-western. Ghana was out of the Nkrumah period and was pro-western. Actually they had the military leaders at that point. Kenya was pro-western. Zaire was pro-western. Mobutu was in power already. And this was pretty much true of the others. I'm forgetting for the moment which the others were.

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*Q: And, of course, the Portuguese Angola and Mozambique were not independent.*

SMITH: And we did not have any AID programs in the Republic of South Africa at the time and still don't.

*Q: How much was Soviet and Chinese influence in those days a consideration for what we were doing?*

SMITH: It was certainly one of them. One of the tenets of U.S. policy in those days, and it continued to be during most of the time I was working in the government on Africa, was to try to keep Africa from becoming a battle zone, an ideological battle zone, between the U.S. and the Soviets. And a lot of what we were doing was to try to keep them out of doing the same thing. There were some places where they were already starting to have an influence. In Guinea, for example, and in a few of the others. So that was an issue. It was an issue in the selection of the countries. It was an issue in not letting the level of AID go too low, even though we hadn't pushed for this concentration in ten countries at the time. One of the things that State worried about a lot was, as we eliminate bilateral AID programs in all these little countries, are we risking that the Soviets are going to march in and take over. That didn't really happen, but it was one of the worries expressed at the time. The Chinese didn't yet have a big role.

*Q: The Soviets really didn't have enough of a foothold in those days to threaten?*

SMITH: No. They were in a few places. They were in Somalia. They were in Guinea. Those were the principal places where they were at the time. And, of course, they were supporting so-called "freedom fighters" in Angola and Mozambique, supporting them with arms and politically.

*Q: Well, what happened, how did we deal with countries such as the Portuguese territories in this period? Let's see, they became independent in 1974?*

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SMITH: This was always very, very delicate, first of all within the State Department, because in the Africa Bureau—and now I'm transitioning from this Korry thing into being directly in it—in the Africa Bureau we favored independence for Angola and Mozambique. But in the European Affairs Bureau the NATO connections and the interest in Portugal—

*Q: Particularly in the Azores, I suppose.*

SMITH: Particularly the Azores—were such that they said, oh, you can't say that kind of thing, you can't do that kind of thing. The third of the Portuguese territories was Guinea-Bissau and I remember very well there was an unofficial visit to Washington from the man who was kind of the leader of the independence movement for Guinea-Bissau, a man named Cabral, who most of the time was a refugee in Guinea across the border from Guinea-Bissau. And some private organizations had arranged for his trip and wanted him to meet State Department people. By now I'm talking early 70s. By then I was a Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Africa Bureau. Our Assistant Secretary at the time, David Newsom, did not feel that he could see Cabral because of the sensitivities over Portugal, but it was all right for me to see him, not in my office but over a drink in a downtown restaurant. And so I had an absolutely fascinating discussion with him, one in which he was essentially lecturing me—there were a couple of other people present—on what the U.S. ought to be doing for independence in these countries. But we were having to play it very delicately because of attitudes in other parts of the State Department and in the White House.

*Q: Well, were you able when you were talking to this Guinea-Bissau leader to explain our position. I mean our NATO commitments and all or did this carry any weight at all?*

SMITH: I was able to explain them. He wasn't impressed, and yet this was a man that who was, I think, a Ph.D. in agriculture—his whole training had been in Portugal, so he lived a good bit of his life in Portugal, was a fierce nationalist for Guinea-Bissau but at the same time saw the possibility of reconciliation with Portugal once there was independence. So

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in some ways you could talk with him more easily than you could with some of the other younger people who had had their whole life within Guinea-Bissau.

*Q: Well, moving on from your time in AID, actually we'll be developing some of these themes as we go anyway, you moved to become Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs?*

SMITH: After that year working on the Korry Report, I went back into AID for two years as Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Africa Bureau. And then from that I went back into State when David Newsom became Assistant Secretary. He wanted to have one of his Deputies with an AID and economics background and invited me to become his Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs as we called it. That was in the fall of '69.

*Q: Did you find there was much difference in your approach from going from AID to State or not?*

SMITH: AID people and State Department people in many ways are quite different. Not having been a career person in either one, I had certain advantages of being able to adjust a little more readily. I wasn't so committed to an AID service that I couldn't work in a State Department service, or vice versa. There are inevitable differences in outlook. Where AID people may be looking primarily at the economic implications and the development implications of what they're doing, State people are looking at the political implications of what they're doing. Sometimes those go very beautifully hand in glove. Sometimes there's a conflict.

*Q: In both these jobs dealing from the AID and State point of view with Africa, how would these, at times when the economic AID side would be at cross purposes say with the political side, how would these be resolved?*

SMITH: The ultimate resolution was forced up to the Under Secretary or even the Secretary of State, but more generally issues got resolved, to use a good African word,

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by “palavers” between the Assistant Secretary of State and the Assistant Administrator of AID for Africa. They met periodically to go over this kind of issue. We would try to resolve them at lower levels, though sometimes it made more sense to push an issue as high as possible so as not to get such a watered-down compromise as to be meaningless to both parties. I'm trying to think of some issues.

Well, one of the general issues that often arose was that AID and the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have always tried to set some criteria on effective use of AID funds. And everyone agrees that that's a good thing. Congress is very concerned about that. The American public, taxpayers, are concerned about that. But there have been times when on the State side it was felt that an overriding political interest justified continuing an AID program or terminating an AID program despite the fact that it was or was not, as the case may be, working properly for efficient use of the money and development purposes. Of course, sometimes that even went as high as the White House over continuing some program. And that's the kind of difference that I think existed philosophically. Another difference which may be less today than it was then is that people in career State Department service always considered themselves an elite, and I think with pretty good reason in terms of, in the earlier years, their educational background, their social background, if you will, where they came from, what they felt their role was and their mission was, and a certain detachment from the rest of the government in terms of expertise and elitism and “we know the answers”. The AID people tended more to come out of Education, Agriculture, Health, more, if you will, practical backgrounds. True, there were plenty of us who were planners and academics and so on as well, particularly in the early Kennedy years. A lot of people came in very much with an academic background. But there was this sensitivity. The fact that the ultimate decision rested with State because AID is an agency of the State Department, and the fact that in the field the Ambassador and the Embassy had primary decision-making meant, that often the AID people felt a little bit like second-class citizens.

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*Q: Did you find that our Ambassadors, looking at it from the Washington perspective, saw things as centered on their country? In other words, rather than looking at, you might say, the broad picture, I mean they wanted to get everything they could possibly get for their country to make things easier for them.*

SMITH: In general, yes, sure. And frankly in Africa the alliance between the investor and the AID Director was really very close. I can't speak as well for some of the Asian countries where we had deeper political issues, Indonesia, India and so on. But in Africa one of the few things that an Ambassador had as a tool in many of these countries was his AID program as a way of developing good relations between that country and the United States. So the Ambassador was very supportive in almost every instance of the AID mission in trying to help it get a larger program. One of the things which led to the Fulbright attitude in the mid-60s and the Korry Report, was the few instances where the Embassy would want to continue an AID program and the AID people said no, because it's not being properly used, or corruption, or this, that and the other thing. And those issues would get referred back to Washington for resolution.

*Q: How did we deal with the problem of corruption?*

SMITH: That's, as I don't need to tell you, a very big one. We have some very clear policy statements from State and from AID about not allowing payoffs, about not allowing under-the-table agreements or anything like that. We are supposed, State is supposed, to do at least some monitoring of what U.S. private business does in this regard under legislation on corruption. But frankly some of it has always had to be, some of the corruption in these African governments has always had to be rationalized by us as part of their culture, or part of the way they build a nation, or part of the leadership process. And you can't, in my view, be a purist about this.

*Q: Could we stop right here just one second?*



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*Q: This is Side 2 of Tape 1 of an interview with Ambassador Robert S. Smith. You were saying we had done some rationalization on the corruption issue.*

SMITH: On the corruption issue. Because it would be impossible for the U.S. to do business—either government business or private business—in any African country if we were purists about corruption.

For example, in Ivory Coast, the country I know best, the President encouraged his Ministers to have investments and land to develop agriculture, and so on, on the theory that he was, first of all, trying to build an indigenous middle class and, second of all, trying to build it around those best educated and most forward looking leaders of his country, his Ministers and others of his senior officials. The fact that some of this then got abused by a number of them was an inevitable outcome. Power is centralized in African countries. The tribal leader in African society is expected to look well, dress well, live well, so that his people can look up to him. When you carry this over into modern society and urban society, it means cars and clothes and fancy homes and servants and all of that. From our point of view this looks like hand-in-the-till and too much wealth collected by a few people by a dubious means, but from their point of view it's pretty much the accepted way until it gets too far, and finally it reaches a point where everyone else down the line says, well, I ought to have my share of this too. And if they don't get their share of it, then it can lead to upheavals.

*Q: Let's say from a practical point of view, you're either in the field or in Washington, did we encourage reporting on let's say modest corruption? I'm not talking about a horrendous scandal. But this permeates a society. Actually one can argue—*

SMITH: Yes.

*Q: —that most of our cities grew in this fashion too. But it's almost embarrassing when something is put on paper, because it has a circulation and a life of its own with not the*

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*best consequences for AID. So how was this dealt with? A bright young officer goes out to X country and is reporting on—I'll use the term, in relative terms, modest corruption. Was this encouraged? Or did they say, oh, for God's sakes don't bother with this.*

SMITH: I think it was more of the latter. As you say, on a major thing, yes, it was certainly reported and was looked into. But I think we didn't do much reporting on the other things. I can remember one example, and I'm going to protect names on this.

*Q: Sure thing.*

SMITH: When I was later Ambassador in Ivory Coast, I learned—whether I learned directly or through members of the Embassy staff, I don't recall at this point—that an important Ivorian official serving as Ambassador in another country was in on a very dubious payoff scheme with Ivory Coast. It was such a dubious scheme and such a big payoff that I thought that the Department ought to know about it. Fortunately I took the precaution of putting it in a letter back to the Department to the Bureau of African Affairs rather than in a cable or an airgram. And I got a response back, “For God's sake, Bob, stay out of that one,” because getting anything public about it or anything spread around about it would, they felt, have generated more problems than it was worth getting into.

*Q: I'm just looking at this for the scholar, using what we're talking about to understand a bit. When they go to the documents, the documents consist pretty much of cables and official documents, that a great deal is done on more sensitive issues by a different method either by personal trips and explaining or through private letters. Is this true?*

SMITH: Yes, I don't think a person looking through the cable traffic of that period would find much on corruption, specific case of corruption, specific issues. I think there might be some general comments on it along the lines that I've suggested earlier of how this is built into the system in a lot of the countries.

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*Q: Now, moving to the time when you came into the State Department as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs for Africa, you had served with both Joe Palmer and with David Newsom. Was there any difference in their style of approach or how they dealt with things that you can think of?*

SMITH: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Joe had been an Africanist for much longer than David. David had never served in Africa until he became Ambassador to Libya, and he came from the post of Ambassador to Libya to be Assistant Secretary—

*Q: And Libya in Foreign Service terms is not an African post?*

SMITH: In those days, it was.

*Q: It was considered an Arab post.*

SMITH: That's right. That's right. And Dave's background had been primarily in the Middle East. Dave's background also was particularly in information. I think he had a number of assignments in public affairs in Middle Eastern countries. He had probably a clearer sense of what the outside, outside the Department and outside the government, had as interests about the areas that he was working on than did Joe. Joe was more the insider. Joe knew more about Africa to begin with. David was what we've always called a "quick study". He learned very well and very thoroughly. There were those differences. Neither one of them had a particular economic affairs orientation, so both were interested in knowing what the economic background was on questions and tended to accept the views of the "experts." Question them, challenge them. I don't mean they not care, but neither one of them tried to become economic experts.

*Q: One last question on the AID-State relationship, although this will come up again, in the Bureau for American Republics they had combined State and AID together. In looking at*

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*this, was this a good way to go? Would this have served as a model for say Africa, or did it make any difference?*

SMITH: It seems to me we talked about that on both sides in the African, the two African bureaus, and decided against it on the theory that regular consultation of separate entities was probably more useful because it was less likely that things would get compromised at such a low level as to be too wishy-washy. As I said before, we tried often to push issues to a high level between the two bureaus to get a good solid decision rather than get some watered down compromise at a low level which then made nobody happy. And I, from afar my impression is that happened a little too much in the Bureau of American Republic Affairs.

*Q: I think this is a very interesting point for somebody who's studied how government works. You can integrate things to a point where really too many people without authority are making easy compromises that really the clash of approaches at an upper level often create better decisions than this.*

SMITH: Absolutely. Absolutely. Going back to what I was telling you earlier about this, taking this Korry Report and putting it into an action policy, again, there were some things that we didn't try to compromise. Some of those we just dropped because we couldn't get a satisfactory agreement between, say Treasury and State, on how to go on something.

*Q: You became Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs within the State Department in 1969. This was the beginning of the Nixon Administration. Was there a change as far as our approach towards Africa was concerned at that point?*

SMITH: Decidedly. The White House wasn't at all interested in Africa. Henry Kissinger as National Security Adviser wasn't at all interested in Africa. Kissinger didn't become interested until much later when Angola came into the center of things in the mid-70s. So Africa policy was pretty much made, within considerable limits as to what it would be, in the State Department, and Secretary Bill Rogers wasn't that interested in Africa either,

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so Dave Newsom had a fairly free hand to develop Africa policy within the limits that we weren't going to sound off against South Africa, even though there was a lot of sentiment to do that, and that we weren't going to sound off against Portugal, even though there was a lot of sentiment within the Bureau to do that. But in terms of developing the policies for the countries and for the programs, he had a lot of authority.

It made it, therefore, an interesting time to work there. On the one hand, Africa wasn't as front and center as it had been under the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations and, therefore, didn't have—people didn't have as much impact on policy toward Africa as relates to the rest of the world. On the other hand, within the African context we had a fair amount of flexibility. I must say, still modifying that again, though, that one of the main things we found ourselves doing in those five years that I was in the Bureau was fighting to keep Africa on the map at all within the U.S. government. For example, policy on sanctions towards Rhodesia: The White House leadership wanted to minimize or eliminate those sanctions. We were fighting very hard to keep them going as part of our role and our role in the UN and so on, and our image within the rest of Africa. That kind of issue, or kind of firefighting, to maintain a policy that had already existed, took a lot of time and energy.

*Q: Could you explain a little about the sanctions against Southern Rhodesia for the person who's reading this.*

SMITH: Yes. Don't hold me to dates, but the white Southern Rhodesian government continued in power even after two other parts of what had been Rhodesia were split off into independent Zambia and Malawi. The government there was a white minority government. It clearly was dominating, if not suppressing, the black majority in the country and was very supportive of the policies of South Africa at the same time. Ultimately the UN and a number of countries individually put sanctions on this white minority government of Rhodesia, or Southern Rhodesia. [Tape off.]

*Q: Okay.*

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SMITH: We were talking about sanctions.

*Q: Sanctions, yes. This is from what's called UDI, the Unilateral Declaration of Independence, by Ian Smith.*

SMITH: That's right. Ian Smith declared UDI from England, from the U.K., and this was opposed by the U.K. and the U.K.'s allies and ultimately opposed by the UN. And one of the ways to do it was imposing sanctions. But that had come up in the 60s, I think.

*Q: It was 1965 that it was declared.*

SMITH: Good. Good.

*Q: I did a little homework.*

SMITH: Well, good for you. And in the Nixon Administration there were people who wanted to turn this around because of the natural resources coming out of Southern Rhodesia that we felt we needed for strategic reasons, fear that the Soviets might get into the picture, and so on and so forth. So there was, I remember, one particular interagency committee and the key spokesman for the Administration on that committee was the then Deputy Attorney General Richard Kleindienst, who was a very vociferous opponent of sanctions. And we had some hot and heavy meetings on that subject. But ultimately we continued to favor sanctions.

*Q: How did you relate with the National Security Council? Did they weigh in on the sanctions issue or not?*

SMITH: Yes, they did also. The Africa men in the NSC staff would sit in on these meetings and also express an Administration position to try to get rid of sanctions. But ultimately I think because above them the White House didn't care that much, as I suggested before, the maintenance of sanctions prevailed.

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*Q: How about the Europeanists? Here I would think they would be on your side as opposed to Angola, to support Great Britain and all.*

SMITH: They were indeed with the British position and so on. So we had a number of allies for that, but I do remember some very tense debates.

*Q: What were our economic interests in Africa other than a place to give AID? We had the obvious political ones because of these countries becoming independent and concern about their orientation. But what about economics?*

SMITH: Okay, the one other political one that was always stressed was their up to 50 votes in the UN trying to get their support for issues in the UN. But on the economic side again it was looking toward natural resources, either that we needed or that we didn't want to be excluded from, and we would cite the percentages of world supplies of copper, cobalt, uranium, iron, etc., etc. as well as agricultural production and then our imports from these African countries, as arguments in favor of maintaining good relations and hence good economic relations with these countries. This would be the big economic issue. Otherwise it was security issues. Staying a little bit neutral on South Africa even was related to the concern about protection of the Horn—

*Q: This is the?*

SMITH: The transit rights.

*Q: The transit rights, yes.*

SMITH: The Cape of Good Hope, I mean.

*Q: The Cape of Good Hope, yes.*

SMITH: The Cape of Good Hope and transit rights. The other issue, well, things like sanctions. One other issue that came up, and here's where the Department had its own

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way, despite general proclivities of the Nixon Administration, was in trying to get American business interests in South Africa to take more into account the need for human rights in their activities. The famous Sullivan principles of Rev. Leon Sullivan were just beginning to be formulated. In '72—I had a pretty big hand in this—we put together a kind of a guidelines papers. I forget its exact title. A guidelines paper for U.S. business in South Africa on what they could do to be more positive toward the blacks of the population. Training programs, equal opportunities of jobs, family allowances, education of the children, etc.

*Q: We're talking about the blacks?*

SMITH: Yes. And this finally got published as a State Department, in fact, a Bureau of African Affairs document. Now, that tells you something. We got it published. We got it distributed widely in the American business community, but as a Bureau of African Affairs publication, not a State Department or a White House publication. So that put it in a context of being on the right side but at a level that could be questioned. Well whose policy does this represent?

*Q: What sort of things were we getting out of our Embassy in South Africa? How did you find them positioned on sanctions and all this?*

SMITH: During much of the time that I was in the Bureau of African Affairs we had a successful Texan businessman as our Ambassador down there, who was a delightful guy—I was down there on an extended trip one time—and who didn't hesitate to talk to various segments of the society, but whose prejudices were clearly in favor of the white minority government of that country. Let me not use the word “prejudices” because I'm not suggesting he was anti-black. I'm suggesting to the contrary that he believed that we had to support that government and go very lightly on criticizing that government on what it was doing in the human rights and racial field. This meant that the reporting reflected that to a considerable degree.



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Now, it wasn't an easy position to be in because there were plenty of people going down to South Africa from the United States who were very critical of South Africa and of U.S. policies and so on, and I think the Ambassador handled it well but that was his orientation and that he felt was his guidance from the White House. So there wasn't an awful lot we could do about though we did, for example, clear this document on guidance U.S. business with the Embassy, with the Ambassador, and he certainly went along with it.

*Q: What you're saying here is that although we had an almost schizophrenic approach towards Africa, raw materials and all this, which high ranking people in the Nixon Administration were concerned about, and we had you might say the State Department and certainly within other areas concern about the problems of Africa as an area in the world, the Africa Bureau was able to hold its own. It was not a matter of being suppressed as I think often is maintained about the Reagan Administration we're talking about today in Central America, for example.*

SMITH: That's absolutely right. I can't speak about how it goes in the Department now since I've been out a number of years, but you know we did hold our own. I think that's a very good way of putting it, and when I look back on my own career, it's ironic that this was one of the most interesting parts of my career, those five years, and yet at a time when we were in some ways fighting rear guard action, but reasonably successfully, to maintain a decent policy toward Africa both on the Southern African issues and on the rest of the continent.

*Q: In a way I suppose you could almost say you were fortunate by suffering from benign neglect on the part of the focus of two highly intelligent and highly political people in foreign affairs. That's President Nixon and Henry Kissinger.*

SMITH: Absolutely. Absolutely. Nixon, by the way, had made a couple of trips to Africa sometime in the 60s, yes, before he ran for President and after he was Vice President around '66 or '67. I helped brief him for a trip he took to a number of African countries.

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And he was a wonderful person to brief because he listened, he asked good questions, he absorbed, and he really made himself very knowledgeable about such things.

*Q: This is the report I get from everybody who has dealt with him in the matter of foreign affairs. Where did the Department of Defense and maybe the CIA fit in? I'm talking about the strategic materiel business. Were they constantly harping away at this, or was this more from high ranking Nixon Administration people who were concerned about the strategic materials?*

SMITH: My recollection is it was more the high ranking Nixon people. Certainly Defense and CIA were concerned about this but I don't remember their being as vocal or as forceful on these sanctions issues as was Dick Kleindienst, in effect representing the Administration.

*Q: It sounds to me like this was you might say a political—and I hate to use the word prejudice—but a political state of mind rather than absolutely overriding interests.*

SMITH: Yes. Yes. And the fact that sanctions were maintained I think in itself is an indication that it never was quite an overriding interest of defense or intelligence or the others.

*Q: I'd like to move now to your time as Ambassador to the Ivory Coast. How did you get the job?*

SMITH: I think I was a loyal and hard worker for Dave Newsom, and when he saw his time coming to an end and a prospective appointment, ambassadorial appointment again for him, he offered to help some of the people around him find other assignments. And I considered myself very fortunate because, after all, I was not a career Foreign Service officer. I was going to a choice country from Africa's point of view and from the U.S. point of view toward Africa. And I think it was a combination of having worked hard, and I hope well, for David in the Bureau of African Affairs, the fact that I visited Ivory Coast on two

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or three occasions and met high level people there and so therefore was already known to the leadership and third, that I was pretty fluent in French, that I was nominated for the post.

I am aware, looking back, that there was some resentment about this from career people, not that I knew of anyone else who was particularly in line for the job but may have been. And also some concern on the political side because I happen to be a lifelong registered Democrat, and here was Nixon as President and had to get through that clearance process, which was not as strict as it apparently is today in the Reagan Administration, but it still figured. I somehow managed to get enough support from enough quarters to get the appointment.

*Q: Did you have any trouble with Senate clearance?*

SMITH: No, that was very simple.

*Q: You know, talking about the resentment, I mean after all you had certainly served your time much more than so many appointments.*

SMITH: Well, I really, you know, I was kind of neither fish nor fowl, because I was not a political appointee clearly and yet I was—well, some people sometimes referred to me then and still have as one of those “AID ambassadors”. There are a few who had a longer time, though mine wasn’t that long, in AID and became ambassadors. So we were not career Foreign Service but we were career international affairs and career government service people with a knowledge of Africa. Yes, I think I went to Ivory Coast knowing as much about Ivory Coast as anyone who’s ever gone there when they got there, to say nothing of what I learned while I was there. But there were always some underlying problems I think, plus I think I have to admit that there are a lot of things I might have done differently if I’d had the career diplomatic experience, serving at other levels within an Embassy other than that one post in Paris many years earlier and in a unique setting

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in the delegation to UNESCO and then this jumping, the next overseas post being as Ambassador.

*Q: What was the United States' interest in the Ivory Coast? We're talking about the 1970s as you went there in 1974.*

SMITH: Ivory Coast was the gem of the French empire in Africa and was still what many people referred to as *chasse gardée* or a protected hunting area of the French. And the French involvement was still, and is to this day, still very great in that country. We had no overriding political issues with them. They were very pro-western. They were very anti-communist. I'm talking about the leadership and pretty well through the country. They were politically stable. They were economically a success story. So our interest I would say was mainly in maintaining good relations just because they were one of the keys to the French area. We had an interest through some investments. We bought a lot of, and still do, Ivory Coast cocoa and coffee, some fish, shrimp and things like that. But basically, you know, if you come down to it in terms of the world as a whole, our economic interests in Ivory Coast were minimal. It was more a question of maintaining good relations and of being able to get the views of the very wise and experienced President of Ivory Coast on some of the other issues in Africa. Frequently I was asked by the Department to consult him not so much on Ivory Coast issues but on what he thought about communism in Africa, later on Angola, problems of coups in other countries, etc. It even started before I got out there. I was named to Ivory Coast at the same time one of my colleagues was named Ambassador to Niger, one of the little countries inland from Ivory Coast, and I went out at the beginning of March and there was a coup d'état in Niger just about the time I got out to Ivory Coast. And the President of Niger was a very close and intimate friend of Houphouët-Boigny, the President of Ivory Coast, and this guy was—he wasn't killed. His wife was killed in the coup. He was put under house arrest and so on. One of the first instructions I got was to go into President Houphouët to ask whether the U.S. should quickly recognize the new government there or hold back as a kind of protest against the coup toward one of his friends and one of the long-time independence leaders in Africa.

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And it was Houphouet's advice, "No, I'm very sad that my brother has been deposed," and he in fact had done a lot to help Diore's family to get out of the country.

*Q: The deposed man was?*

SMITH: Hamani Diore. But he said, "We've got to go on. We've got to live with our brother countries. We've got to live in this world together. We want relations to be as normal as possible with a new government there so that it doesn't get ideas of communist affiliation or something else, so please tell your government go ahead and send the Ambassador out." And we did. And I think that Houphouet's views were an important consideration in the timing of sending our new Ambassador out.

*Q: Could you describe—we're talking about President Felix Houphouet-Boigny. Could you describe his style of rule, his personality in your dealings with him? Because he's a major figure in African history.*

SMITH: Here I am very prejudiced in his favor, because I think this is a remarkable man, and I say this to begin with. I've read a lot about him. I met him for the first time in 1967 on my first trip to Africa. I had gone out with Joe Palmer when Joe was first named Assistant Secretary and I was in the Special Assistant assignment, and George Morgan was ambassador in Ivory Coast at the time. The Embassy had a military attaché's airplane, and we flew together to Yamoussoukro the President's birthplace where he keeps a palatial home, for a day with him. And that had been my first impression of him. And I've seen him quite regularly over the 21 years since, including as recently as four months ago.

*Q: He's still the President?*

SMITH: He's still the President. He is today in his mid-80s. He brought this country to independence, but not only did he do that, he was the leader of the principal independence movement of all of French West and Central Africa, starting right after World War

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II. Something called the Rassemblement Democratique Africain was the creation of Houphouet-Boigny.

Houphouet himself was a tribal chief of the largest single tribe in Ivory Coast. He was a cocoa and coffee planter. He had medical training as far as the French allowed, to kind of a paramedical or sub-doctor level, in Dakar. In that training at a particular school in Dakar he had the opportunity to meet a lot of other French Africans who went up there for training. So he didn't get into politics until he was in his early 40s. But by then he was widely known within Ivory Coast and widely known among some of the neighboring colonies. He was the principal spokesman of Ivory Coast to France. He was, in fact, a Deputy in the French Assembly representing Ivory Coast, and one of two Africans to become Ministers in French governments. He was Minister of Health in several governments in the mid-50s, particularly under Mendes-France. I forget who the others were. So he cut a very important figure in French-African relations, in inter-Africa relations and to some limited extent in relation to some of the English speaking Africans such as Nkrumah next door and the Nigerians, though much less so, because the line of division was pretty sharp between the francophones and the anglophones. When independence came, he was, well, prior to it he was made, I think they called him Prime Minister, and then he was made President at independence, and he has been re-elected every five years ever since. He's now in his mid-80s. He has not named a successor. This is a point of concern for a lot of people. His own statement on this as recently as two or three years ago was that he was reluctant to name a successor, and have fights start to undermine that successor until it became absolutely essential. There's some talk now that he may name a Prime Minister. There is a mechanical means of succession in the country, but that does not guarantee that the successor will become the permanent President.

This man operates as a father figure and a patriot—he's truly the George Washington of his country. Only George stepped down after a couple of terms as President and retired to his Mount Vernon farm. Houphouet is not willing to do that. He looks upon, and talks about even his Ministers as “my children.” My wife and I were back on a visit in 1980, for

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example, and we went to see Houphouet Yamoussoukro and several Ministers were there at the same occasion, and we were there for a luncheon. And after the luncheon we sat and talked privately with Houphouet, my wife and I, and I don't know what the reference was, but it was something about how he had to see all these Ministers that day, as well as seeing us, because he had to deal with the children's quarrels among his Ministers, "les querrels d'enfants." And that's truly how he looks upon his people. He's capable of fantastic mediation and negotiation. He believes strongly in, another word he uses a lot is "dialogue". Encouraging dialogue, or the Africa word for it is palaver, within the country, among countries and so on. He has taken a stand believing in dialogue with South Africa, much to the disgust of some of the leaders in the southern tier of African countries and the English-speaking countries. He has not favored sanctions. He has favored dialogue as a way of getting the white South African government to change its views, and this has showed up a lot of the time. He's been very effective, and while there have been coups all around in neighboring countries and counter-coups and more coups, and while there have been from time to time rumors of coups, nothing has ever really evolved in terms of an anti-Houphouet takeover attempt in Ivory Coast. Now, this isn't to say it couldn't happen if the man reached a point of being so old and perhaps senile that nothing is happening. They are quite sensitive—this last trip was in November. My last trip was in March and November before that—

*Q: This is March of 19—?*

SMITH: '88.

*Q: '88.*

SMITH: The people in the country are quite sensitive to what happened to Bourguiba in Tunisia.

*Q: This Habib Bourguiba who was forced out after he turned senile. This was last year.*

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SMITH: Right. He was much like Houphouet. They were both pre-independence leaders who brought their countries to independence, fathers of their country and all those parallels, and friends. Not intimate friends, but friends. So everyone was watching that as an example. And there have been a few stirrings in Ivory Coast that seem to be linked at least in part to, well, look what happened to Bourguiba.

*Q: When you had a problem, let's say you had an economic problem or any problem, did you go to the Foreign Minister or did you go to the President?*

SMITH: It depended on the depth of the problem and the circumstances. I would frequently do both, see the Foreign Minister first and then the President. Sometimes I would deal with other Ministers directly. Ivory Coast was very open about—gave Ambassadors a good deal of freedom about seeing people. We were very free to travel around the country, no restrictions on travel. We were asked to inform the Chief of Protocol when we were planning a trip, for our own protection and so he could alert Prefects around the country, but not in any way to control our travels. The only restrictions we had was we were not free to look at military establishments or discuss military issues with the military officials in the country. Now, we could talk to the Minister of Defense, who was a civilian. That restriction even applied to our Military Attach#s.

*Q: And what did our Military Attach#s do?*

SMITH: They were allowed to meet socially with the counterpart military. They spent time with the French military advisers. They were allowed on certain, you know, guided trips to military establishments, things like that.

*Q: Let me just stop here for one second. We're getting—*



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*Q: This is Tape 2, Side 1 of an interview with Ambassador Robert Smith on his time in the Foreign Service. We were talking about what our Military Attach#s were doing in the Ivory Coast.*

SMITH: Yes, that's about all I think worth saying on that but, coming back to how—you'd asked me how I dealt with the President or the Foreign Minister or other Ministers on different issues. Sometimes Washington would ask all the Ambassadors in Africa to go in at the highest possible levels on issues coming up at the UN, for example, or the sanctions issue or Southern Africa. It got particularly hot in—I was there from '74 through '76,—in '75 when the Angola issue became heated up and when, as we said, Henry Kissinger discovered Africa in Angola.

*Q: Could you describe the Angola issue please for the record?*

SMITH: The Angolan issue essentially was that there were at least three groups in opposition to the communist-led government of Angola after independence. Independence was I believe '74 of Angola.

*Q: I'll check on that. '74.*

SMITH: '74. And a pro-communist or certainly far left group took over the government and there continued to be opposition groups fighting it. And the question was what our role should be in relation to those opposition groups. We did provide military support to at least one of them. I think maybe to two of them. One by way of Zaire, one by way of Namibia and South Africa. And Kissinger felt that this was very important to offset the threat of a spread of communism in Africa. And this led to his traveling to Africa for the first time, talking to a number of government leaders. He did not get to Ivory Coast, but asked for, wanted Houphouet's views. And the then Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Bill Schaufele did get to Abidjan to see Houphouet and we went to see Houphouet on this question and Bill also had a private luncheon with Houphouet on this question.

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Essentially Houphouet favored our supporting UNITA, the principal opposition group to the government in Angola, because he felt that this was one of the ways to keep down the threat of the spread communism in Africa. So we had his blessing for our policy. Here again was where he didn't reflect the opinion of say views at the UN. [Tape off.]

*Q: Well, again then we're really talking about a rather unique relationship in that we were using—using is the wrong term—but accepting—*

SMITH: Turning to.

*Q: Turning to the leader of the Ivory Coast as an adviser. [Interrupted by telephone.] Turning more to the nuts and bolts. How did you find our Embassy staffed in the Ivory Coast?*

SMITH: Let me just tell you one more Houphouet story because it's very interesting about the man. Let's go back to when you were asking much earlier about corruption. I came across a situation in which a big payoff was being made by an American company to an intermediary, non-Ivorian African in order to get something done in the way of a U.S. investment. And this was a time when Congress was beginning to say a great deal about objecting to payoffs and all the rest, and I thought I was in the right to challenge this. And I simply said to the American company representative that I thought that this was not consistent with our laws and I did not think it was a good precedent to be setting and so on. I thought that the people listening to me would understand this and would accept it. Instead these Americans proceeded to tell this African intermediary what I had said. Well, the African intermediary—[Interrupted by telephone.]

I had a visit from this African who in fact was the son of another former President who had been defeated in a coup, got killed in a coup, who had been a friend of Houphouet and, therefore, Houphouet was befriending these sons of the former President, another of his old buddies. And I told him the same things I had told the Americans. Well, he went

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right back to Houphouet and said that I was interfering with his ability to do business in the country. And, lo and behold, very quickly I had a call from the presidency to come in and see the President. And the President sat me down, we were very friendly, good friends by then. He knew I was a friend of his and a friend of his country and the U.S., of course, was friendly and so on. But he admonished me in no uncertain terms that this was not something I should have done because, and I quote him, "this man was just trying to earn an honest living". Alright, you can say he was condoning corruption, payoffs. Again, it gives you an idea of how those fit into African society. He was also defending loyally the son of a dear friend. Now, I happen to think that the man in question was an abominable person and he has proven to be that in a number of other ways since, and I'm sorry that Houphouet did this. But it didn't hurt me, it didn't hurt our relationship then or thereafter. This, again, was one of the ways that this man was very straightforward. And you could deal with him on a plus or a minus. There were times when I had to go in with an unfavorable U.S. position, such as our position on coffee, an international coffee agreement where the U.S. didn't want it and Ivory Coast, as a major producer, wanted it very badly. And that meant having to make an unpopular statement. Alright, he made clear what he didn't like about it so I would be clear to get that conveyed back again, but it never affected personal relationships. A very unusual man.

*Q: Well, moving from him to the Embassy, how did you find it staffed and how it worked when you were there?*

SMITH: Well, we had an Embassy of about 17 Americans in the Embassy itself and probably 150 Americans in the U.S. government offices in the country as a whole, including an AID regional office, going back to what I had helped bring into being 8 or 10 years earlier. Therefore, a large AID presence, a USIS staff a regional Military Attach#'s office, a regional CIA office, a regional budget office for the State Department, a whole lot of people who had regional responsibilities not directly under my authority. So it was an odd kind of governing and negotiating and dealing. When they were doing something in relation to the Ivory Coast, they came under the Embassy and under the Ambassador.

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When they were doing something, traveling elsewhere, or programs elsewhere, I had absolutely no say in it. We worked this out I think reasonably well.

I think the Embassy officers felt that they were oddly in a kind of minority status in all of this. I'm sorry to say there was a little too much segregation of the Embassy people on the one hand and the AID people, who were the largest other group on the other hand, with the Defense and CIA people, a few of them fitting in kind of in between and mixing fairly easily. I tried to keep some balance in this. Again, my own orientation helped, my own background in having been both in State and AID. The AID Mission Director and I, the regional Mission Director and I, had worked together in the AID Bureau of African Affairs at an earlier stage. The Junior Economic Officer in the Embassy and I had worked together on some debt negotiations in the time I was in the State Department, so I had old friends and acquaintances and colleagues in both areas. There were a few times when I really had to say to one side or the other I just think you are being unreasonably isolated or separatist or prejudiced or whatever. There was that kind of thing.

*Q: Was your DCM helpful, supportive in all this or not?*

SMITH: I had a very bad history with two DCMs. I don't know whether you want to go into that or not.

*Q: Well, I'll tell you. I'm not trying to get into personalities. I mean I know nothing of the background of this, but I'm trying to get how Embassies work and some of the problems. So whatever you'd care to say on that.*

SMITH: Well, without getting into the personalities, one of the first DCMs had probably been as involved in Africa as I had. The second one had never been involved in Africa before. I don't think either one of them expected as much of an activist Ambassador as I was. My interest in the country, my interest in the issues, my wanting to be involved in all of them, and also a pretty strong background in administration, meant that I probably got into things more than I should have. I should have, looking back, left more of the

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inner workings of the Embassy complex to these two DCMs. And I think much of where we had a problem was, one, that I was not career Foreign Service but, two, that I was thoroughly interested in the details. And that meant that except that, when I was traveling, they probably felt they didn't have enough to do. We probably could have worked that out. We weren't able to.

*Q: Well, how was this resolved?*

SMITH: Well, I asked the first one to leave and the second one was away from the post in the last few months that I was there and then came back as DCM in the transition with the new Ambassador and then he went on somewhere else.

*Q: This is an unclassified interview, but it's a question that I do ask. How did you find the CIA there? Was it supportive, or how did you find it?*

SMITH: Very cooperative. Very cooperative. The principal CIA man there for most of the time I was there had had a similar post elsewhere in Africa in a place I had visited a number of times, and I knew him from those visits. So we had at least an acquaintance before I got to the post in Abidjan where he already was. My wife and I got on very nicely with him and his wife. She was French and was in charge of French teaching for the Embassy at the time, and my wife was taking regular French lessons, not from her but from one of the other staff members. So we had a nice social relationship. And I always felt that—he was, of course a regional person, covering several countries. So he was one of these that was traveling a certain amount, had involvement elsewhere as well as in Ivory Coast, didn't have major things to do.

*Q: I would think that in the Ivory Coast this was not a high priority by any means.*

SMITH: No, it was more a good place to be located and to travel from and back to. In a few instances when I wanted particular information that I thought could come best from him, he was very cooperative. And I can't recall any clashes or problems. I had had a fair

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number of dealings as Deputy Assistant Secretary with CIA people, and again I've had quite good relationships on various working levels on economic issues before I went out to Abidjan.

*Q: Well, to move beyond this you left in what 1976?*

SMITH: Left in '76.

*Q: And went to what, the National Security Council?*

SMITH: I was briefly, about six months, with the National Security Council as their Africa and UN person. And then about a month or so after Carter came in I was replaced because Brzezinski wanted a whole new staff. Ironical that I was a Democrat, but he wanted a Democrat who had been for Carter. And then I went to work for about two and a half years with the government agency, the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation, as their Vice President for Development. And then I retired in the summer of '79.

*Q: Well, because of time constraints here, you sort of had if not unique, very close to unique experience. You've served in AID. You've served in State. You've been an Ambassador. You've also been with the National Security Council. And how did you find these things in the time you were there. We're putting you back into the, really to the 60s and 70s. How did you feel these worked as far as Africa was concerned?*

SMITH: Well, to summarize, first of all, I think as a student I would have thought the State Department had full control and responsibility for policy toward any particular country or part of the world. When I got into the middle of it from these various angles, it became very evident that, while the State Department was the principal spokesman and the principal policy maker, a lot of negotiating and compromising was necessary on just about every issue, because of the interests of other parts of the government. Not only the White House but Treasury, Defense, CIA, AID, Commerce and so on.

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For a long time that was one of the things that made working in Washington exciting, the challenge of dealing with these issues which cut across bureaucratic lines. I chaired delegations to two or three international debt conferences on settling the debts of certain African countries. I had more trouble negotiating within the U.S. delegation between Treasury and State than I did negotiating with the other donors, the British, the French, the Germans and so on, or even with the debtor country. And this was one of these experiences that again stands out among the problems of doing business within the U.S. government. I think I finally reached a point where I got sick and tired of all these damned interagency quarrels and am delighted not to be doing that.

*Q: It reaches that point. Let me ask a question. Looking back on it, what would say was your feeling of greatest accomplishment and also greatest frustration?*

SMITH: Probably the greatest accomplishment was that I served for several years as head of the U.S. delegation to Ghana debt negotiations, and we managed to resolve those negotiations at a conference in Rome while I was on my way to post in Abidjan. It's unusual in government to take an issue from start to finish, particularly an issue that lasts for several years, and be able to see it come to a successful conclusion. Now, I don't mean we solved all of Ghana's problems, but we completed three rounds over a five-year period of debt negotiations at that point. And it was very satisfying to take that from start to finish. There are other things that I could mention, but I suppose that was the most. Of course, being Ambassador was a wonderful experience in its broad sense, and being Ambassador in Ivory Coast was delightful and I now go back quite frequently on business, which I enjoy tremendously, and have lots of friends there still. The biggest frustration. Well, I guess ultimately what I said was in some ways challenging was also the frustration, the interagency struggles that one faces from whatever position one is—low levels, middle levels, high levels—in getting things through and across.

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*Q: And a final question we're asking because this we hope will be also used for study for people at the Foreign Service Institute, officers coming up. How do you evaluate the Foreign Service as an instrument of American foreign policy?*

SMITH: I think it's a critical instrument of foreign policy. There has got to be some group, not necessarily the most highly technically specialized, but some group of good generalists who can take the overview look at our policies in particular countries, particular regions, particular issues. And I think that it deserves more autonomy than it seems to be having at the present time.

*Q: Do you feel they were getting the right people or not, or the ones you've been dealing with?*

SMITH: I haven't had as many dealings in the last few years as I did, well, in government or when I first—

*Q: I'm really speaking about the time you were in the Foreign Service.*

SMITH: Okay. Well, there was a change which I don't think was necessarily just of Foreign Service people. Going back to the 60s and then the “me” generation of the early 70s, I just think that the young Americans coming into government today or growing up today, you can say, have less of a sense of social responsibility and civic responsibility than they did when you and I were growing up. It was a very honorable and wonderful thing to get a job in government when I was growing up, and I was thrilled when I had my first and successive government jobs. I think that people today look on government maybe as, well, that might be something to do. The country looks on government, kind of denigrating it to a great extent. And I think all of that plus the general attitude of young people of “what's in it for me” is so much stronger. That has been reflected as well in the new recruits into the Foreign Service.



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*Q: Well, Mr. Ambassador, I would like to keep this going, but time—thank you very much and I really appreciate this.*

SMITH: Thank you very much, too.

End of interview